

## RESEARCH CATEGORY: LARGE-SCALE QUANTITATIVE STUDY

### EDUCATION OUTCOMES

#### Project description and aim:

This quantitative study involves an outreach programme for primary and secondary school students in Lancashire. The participating schools asked all students (with consent forms) to complete an annual attitude survey. This research aims to identify any key points in the education journey where certain attitudes may be linked to HE progression and whether any specific type of activity helps shift such attitudes.

The research team for this project has a partnership with six secondary schools and eight of their feeder primary schools, as part of a School University Network (SUN). The team delivers a programme of activities including, but not limited to, workshops, masterclasses, campus visits, mentoring programmes, residentials and subject-specific enrichment activities.

In this study, the researchers use pre-collected student demographic data with questionnaire data that assesses students' attitudes towards HE. The three main areas that the researchers wish to investigate in this project are:

1. Whether there are links between certain widening participation (WP) indicators set by the Office for Students (OfS) (e.g. first in the family to study at university or living in a low-HE participation neighbourhood) and attitudes toward HE.
2. Whether a change in attitudes can be linked with certain activities to assess which are more effective, e.g. are mentoring programmes more or less effective than academic enrichment?
3. Whether certain attitudes are linked to progression by cross-referencing survey responses with HE progression.

#### Methods:

The researchers are collecting data on the students to assess whether they meet the WP criteria and tracking them using the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT). Researchers can then analyse whether certain attitudes correlate to demographic data and track changes in attitudes linked to the activities in which students have participated. In the long term, they will be able to track these changes over time and eventually use the HEAT tracker to identify whether the students go on to study in HE.

All parents/carers and students over the age of 13 years are given a Data Privacy Notice. In this research, the lawful basis for processing the data for evaluation and monitoring is a public task. Parents/carers and students can object to their data being processed and stored in this way at any time. If students/parents consent to participation in the research, the researchers will link the data and use it for research purposes. If parents complete a reply slip about the SUN programme but do not consent to the research, the student can still take part in the programme activities, but the researchers cannot use their data for research.

To monitor and evaluate this programme, the researchers use the HEAT database. This tracker provides the following information:

- Anonymised KS4 attainment data
- Anonymised KS5 attainment data
- HE progressions data
- Graduate outcome data

The researchers collect the following data and store it on HEAT along with information about the activities in which the students have participated:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Email address (if available)
- Postcode
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Whether anyone in their family has gone to university

In addition to the above data, the researchers also collect data on whether students are eligible for pupil premium funding as a proxy for household income, whether students are young carers, whether they have experience of care and whether they have a disability. These are some of the criteria the researchers use to assess whether students are eligible for the WP activities. This data will not be stored on HEAT, but is held on a spreadsheet on a secure server.

The researchers collect information about students' attitudes towards HE annually, through a questionnaire completed at school.

### Key ethical considerations:

Initial school consent was gained as part of the arrangements for running the outreach programme with the schools.

Given the age of the participants, parental consent is required as well as pupils' consent. As data collection is via questionnaire, pupils' consent can be recorded through its submission. The questionnaire indicated the purpose of the study and each head of year had emphasised to pupils their right not to complete the questionnaire. Teachers were also briefed on the right of a pupil not to complete the questionnaire and the need to provide alternative activities.

Parental consent was more difficult to obtain, for two reasons. Firstly, the essential content on the information sheet was extensive and potentially off-putting to parents. The risks of the study and the time commitment required from pupils are both very low, and the questionnaire will be conducted in school time.

The information letters covered both GDPR requirements – that this study was being completed on a public task basis – and the ethical requirement to obtain consent. This complexity in messages and wording made the letters difficult to follow especially for those for whom English is a second language.

The second issue was that, for some pupils taking part in the programme from less advantaged households, parents were less likely to return completed consent forms. It would have been potentially more inclusive to assume consent or to allow pupils to consent without parental consent. However, given the age of the participants, neither of these options was ethically justifiable.

All pupils were permitted to take part in the outreach events, regardless of whether they or their parent(s) gave consent for the study.

### Scientific limitations and recommendations for future research:

Guidance around ethics, and the ability for schools to take an opt-out approach rather than requiring opt-in consent from parents, would ensure that more students can engage in WP interventions and that they are proportionally represented in evaluation and research results.

Guidance around and consideration of research designs should be more inclusive in the ethical collection of data from pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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